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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

I. Introduction

1. In a letter dated 29 December 2016 (S/2016/1129), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) until 31 December 2019 and requested me to submit a report every six months on the implementation of its mandate. The present report covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2017 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also outlines the activities of UNOWAS and progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. The reporting period was characterized by the peaceful resolution of the post-election crisis in the Gambia; government initiatives to promote development in Cabo Verde and Ghana; and political reforms and electoral preparations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal. While some headway was made in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, the security situation in West Africa and the Sahel remained fragile. Terrorist activities and cross-border criminality, notably piracy and trafficking in drugs, arms and persons, continued to pose serious threats to the stability of the region. Despite regional efforts to counter Boko Haram, continuing violence has deepened a serious humanitarian crisis and development deficit in the Lake Chad basin. During a visit from 2 to 7 March 2017, a delegation from the Security Council took stock of the situation and raised awareness of the crisis. The visit led to the adoption of resolution 2349 (2017) on 31 March. Meanwhile, at the fifty-first ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in Monrovia on 4 June, the President of Togo, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, was elected Chair.

A. Political and governance trends

3. On 19 January 2017, the President of the Gambia, Adama Barrow, was sworn in at the embassy of the Gambia in Dakar, where he had temporarily relocated for security reasons following the refusal by the former President, Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh, to accept defeat in the presidential election held on 1 December 2016.

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Diplomatic efforts made by the Heads of State of the member countries of ECOWAS, with the support of my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2337 (2017), resulted in the departure of the former President from the country on 21 January 2017. President Barrow returned to the Gambia on 26 January and began focusing efforts on establishing a new cabinet, supporting the preparation and conduct of legislative elections and developing a joint vision for the country, in consultation with members of the ruling coalition. In the legislative elections, held on 6 April, the United Democratic Party, a party in the ruling coalition led by the current Minister for Foreign Affairs, A. N M. Ousainou Darboe, secured an absolute majority in the National Assembly.

4. In Cabo Verde, the Government, led by the Prime Minister, José Ulisses Correia e Silva, advanced its reform agenda focused on privatization, decentralization and investment in the tourism sector.

5. In Ghana, the President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, appointed 54 ministers and deputy ministers to serve in his cabinet, increasing the total number of ministers to 110, up from 78 under the previous Administration. The Government immediately began implementing its key priorities of job creation; economic stabilization; the creation of a business-friendly environment; the revival of the country's agricultural sector; and investment in the health sector.

6. In Côte d'Ivoire, a new Government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Amadou Gon Coulibaly, was appointed on 11 January. In line with the provisions approved through a constitutional referendum in October 2016, Daniel Kablan Duncan, who had served as Prime Minister during the first term in office of the President, Alassane Ouattara, assumed the newly created post of Vice-President. Since January, the country has experienced a series of revolts and mutinies by soldiers demanding monetary compensation from the Government. These incidents underscore the challenges that remain to be addressed in the area of security sector reform.

7. In Guinea, the opposition deplored the fact that local elections were not held in February, as stipulated in the political agreement of 12 October 2016 between the Government and the opposition. A number of steps still need to be taken before local elections can be organized, including the approval by the Constitutional Court of a bill reforming the Electoral Code.

8. In Senegal, preparations are under way for parliamentary elections on 30 July. The amendment to the electoral law adopted on 3 January by the National Assembly included the addition of 15 parliamentary seats to represent the diaspora. Meanwhile, the arrest and indictment on 7 March of the Mayor of Dakar, Khalifa Sall, a possible presidential contender for the elections in 2019, on charges of fraud, triggered heated debate over the independence of the judiciary.

9. In Sierra Leone, the President, Ernest Bai Koroma, announced on 14 February that presidential and legislative elections would be held on 7 March 2018 and that a constitutional referendum would be held by September 2017.

10. In Liberia, preparations continued for the presidential election scheduled for 10 October.

11. In Togo, the Government took a number of measures in connection with the holding of the long overdue local elections and the reforms that remained pending under the comprehensive political agreement of 2006. Notably, a national committee for reflection on constitutional reform was established on 3 January to propose reforms in concert with the High Commission for Reconciliation and Strengthening of National Unity. The payment of reparations to the victims of the political violence that prevailed between 1958 and 2005, in line with the recommendations of

the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, began in March. Moreover, on 19 January, a National Council for Monitoring Decentralization was established and the High Authority for Combating Corruption and Related Offences commenced operations. However, opposition leaders denounced the measures as insufficient and reiterated their demands for the holding of local elections.

12. In Benin, the National Assembly failed to secure the majority required to consider the constitutional reforms proposed by the President, Patrice Athanase Guillaume Talon, including the imposition of a single six-year presidential term; public funding of political parties; and the prohibition of pretrial detention and police custody for incumbent presidents and cabinet members.

13. In Burkina Faso, against the backdrop of a worsening security situation, including protests by police personnel, on 20 February, the President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, appointed Jean-Claude Bouda as Minister of Defence. One week later, the President also replaced the heads of the police and the armed forces. In addition, a new Ministry of Security was created in February and steps were taken to implement a strategic plan on the reform of the defence sector for the period 2017-2021. Following the finalization of the constitutional reform proposals by the Constitutional Committee on 10 January, regional consultations were held between 18 March and 20 April and a referendum on their adoption is expected to be held later in 2017.

14. In the Niger, the political situation continued to be marked by tensions between the ruling majority and the opposition. Local elections previously scheduled to be held in January were postponed indefinitely. The opposition candidate in the second round of the 2016 presidential election, Hama Amadou, was sentenced in absentia on 13 March to one year in prison on child smuggling charges. On 21 April, in response to a series of student strikes, some of which involved violent clashes with security forces, the Government signed an agreement with student representatives, in which it committed to reducing the backlog on scholarship grants and investing in building additional university infrastructure. In addition, in a cabinet reshuffle on 18 April, the President decided that the Minister of Employment, Labour and Social Protection would take the role of the Minister of Higher Education, and vice versa.

15. In Mauritania, on 17 March, the Senate rejected a draft law for constitutional reform, which included the abolishment of the Senate and significant changes to the Constitutional Council and the High Court of Justice, as well as a modification to the national flag. The draft law had been passed by a majority of the National Assembly one week earlier. On 20 April, the Council of Ministers adopted a decree for a referendum on the draft law, which is planned for 15 July.

16. In Nigeria, on 5 April, following a series of protests against socioeconomic hardship held in several cities, the President, Muhammadu Buhari, launched the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, 2017-2020. The Government also continued to pursue its efforts to combat corruption. In that regard, on 19 April, the head of the National Intelligence Agency and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation were suspended in connection with the alleged misappropriation of public funds. Notwithstanding these positive developments, national debate centred on the President's long absences from the country on medical grounds.

B. Security trends

17. Instability in Mali continued to spread into north-eastern Burkina Faso and the western area of the Niger. On 2 March, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Al Mourabitoun, Ansar Eddine and Front de libération du Macina merged to form a

new alliance, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, which is composed of leaders of different ethnic backgrounds. The Group has already claimed responsibility for several deadly attacks against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and Malian forces and is expected to continue carrying out such attacks. In Burkina Faso, the number of terrorist attacks against military and civilian targets increased during the first quarter of the year. In the Niger, terrorist and violent extremist activity spread from the north of the country and contributed to Boko Haram militant activities in the south. On 26 April, representatives of the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority, a regional organization seeking to develop the contiguous areas of Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger, at the request of the three Heads of State, visited the Lake Chad Basin Commission in N'Djamena to discuss the establishment of a joint security force to more effectively control the borders shared by the three countries and to enhance their capacity to combat terrorism. Meanwhile, Operation Barkhane, conducted by French forces, remained under way in the region, one element of which was to provide support for forces of Mali and Burkina Faso in their efforts to search for terrorists in the Soum province of Burkina Faso. On 13 April, at its 679th meeting, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union endorsed the strategic concept of operations for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and authorized the deployment of the Joint Force, comprising some 5,000 military, police and civilian personnel, for an initial period of 12 months. It also requested the United Nations Security Council to authorize the deployment of the force.

18. In Nigeria, a surge in patrols and a scaling-up of the Niger Delta amnesty programme, as well as more vigorous outreach by the Government, under the leadership of the Vice-President, Yemi Osinbajo, led to a significant reduction in the number of violent incidents in the Niger Delta region. However, the continued detention without trial of the leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky, despite a court ordering his release in December 2016, triggered further clashes between security forces and members of the Movement. In addition, violent clashes between farmers and pastoralists in the Middle Belt and other regions continued to strain intercommunal relations. From January to April, clashes between farmers and pastoralists resulted in over 700 deaths. Violent confrontations between pastoralists and farmers were also observed in other West African countries, including Ghana and Benin.

19. The production and trafficking of drugs remained a source of instability. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force of the Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP), a multi-agency anti-trafficking initiative, seized over 7 kilograms of cocaine between January and March in Mali alone. In addition, there were reports of an increase in cannabis production and consumption, as well as in methamphetamine trafficking in the region. Moreover, on 10 April, the Chair of ECOWAS, the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, called on ECOWAS member States to strengthen regulatory regimes and enforce legislation against the counterfeiting of pharmaceuticals in the region.

20. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea remained a significant challenge. A shift in piracy tactics was noted, from theft of cargo to hijackings for ransom. Of the 27 maritime crew members kidnapped for ransom worldwide between January and March, 17 were abducted off the coast of Nigeria.

C. Violence perpetrated by Boko Haram

21. Since my previous report (S/2016/1072), a slight decrease in the number of attacks carried out by Boko Haram and a larger decrease in the number of fatalities were reported in the Niger and Nigeria. In the period from 1 January to 15 April, 161 security incidents related to Boko Haram in the two countries resulted in 143 reported deaths. Despite efforts by the Multinational Joint Task Force and the countries, Boko Haram continued to perform raids on urban and rural settlements and staged heavily armed attacks against military positions in Borno State, Nigeria. On 9 February, Boko Haram insurgents ambushed newly trained army recruits along the Ajiri-Dikwa road in the Dikwa area of Borno State. The incident reportedly resulted in the deaths of seven Nigerian soldiers and more than 30 Boko Haram militants. On 15 March, approximately 300 Boko Haram fighters attacked a police station and a military base in the Magumeri area of Borno State. They were repelled by the military forces, but a number of soldiers were injured and the military base was destroyed. Attacks on military convoys also continued. Two assaults on the Maiduguri-Biu highway on 28 and 31 January, which had earlier been declared safe, underlined the tenuous nature of the gains made. The continuing use of women and children as suicide agents, including pregnant women and mothers with babies, was particularly alarming. On 20 January, three female suicide bombers, one of them carrying a baby on her back, blew themselves up, killing at least 11 people and injuring 14 others at a checkpoint in the town of Madagali, Adamawa State, Nigeria. Several abductions of women and young people were also recorded during the reporting period in Borno State. In a video released on 22 March, the leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, reiterated calls to create an Islamic caliphate across West Africa, while the group's faction under Abu Musab al-Barnawi reportedly intensified attempts to win over local populations.

22. Although confronted with continuing logistical and financial challenges, the Multinational Joint Task Force continued to play a key role in the response to Boko Haram. In collaboration with the Force, the Cameroonian and Nigerian military reportedly rescued over 7,000 captives who were being held by Boko Haram between March and April. The ongoing offensive also led to the surrender of hundreds of Boko Haram fighters. In an unfortunate turn of events, however, on 17 January, the Nigerian military accidentally bombed an internally displaced persons camp in the town of Rann in Borno State, underscoring the need to further improve intelligence-gathering and civilian-military relations in the fight against Boko Haram. In Senegal, a suspected Boko Haram recruiter was arrested on 12 April and progress was made in setting up a rehabilitation centre for ex-militants in the Diffa region of the Niger.

23. On 6 May, following negotiations facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Government of Switzerland, Boko Haram released a further 82 of the girls who had been abducted from Chibok in April 2014, bringing the total number of girls freed to 105, of the 276 initially abducted. The Government is making efforts, with United Nations support, to help them to reintegrate into society. On 12 April, the Nigerian Department of State Services revealed that it had averted planned attacks on the embassies of the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Abuja.

D. Socioeconomic trends

24. West African economies are rebounding from a slump in export commodity prices and the concomitant economic slowdown. An economic growth rate of 4.3 per cent is forecast for West Africa in 2017 by the International Monetary Fund,

while the Central Bank of West African States projects an expansion of up to 7 per cent for members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union. According to an analysis by the World Bank, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal are ranked among the seven best-performing countries in Africa. However, owing to a decrease in world prices and a glut of stock offerings, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire announced in April a 10 per cent reduction in the purchase price for cocoa. After officially entering into recession in 2016, Nigeria is expected to resume modest growth at a rate of 0.8 per cent in 2017, reflecting an increase in oil production, strong performance in the agricultural sector and the stabilization of the national currency. An increase in oil production is also expected to drive the growth rate in Ghana to 6 per cent, which should help to counter the country's rising level of debt.

E. Humanitarian trends

25. The overall humanitarian situation in the region remains dire, marked by high levels of food insecurity, widespread displacement and susceptibility to epidemics. Extreme poverty, climate change, armed conflict and insecurity are behind the high levels of structural, chronic and acute vulnerability present in the region, which continue to require significant humanitarian and development action. Despite larger-than-average harvests in 2016 in much of the Sahel, approximately 30 million people are facing food insecurity, 12 million of whom are in need of emergency food assistance, and around 4.7 million children under the age of 5 years are severely malnourished.

26. Across the region, almost 5 million people are suffering from the consequences of forced displacement. While the number of internally displaced persons in the Lake Chad Basin has decreased slightly from 2.6 million to 2.4 million since the previous reporting period, 6.7 million people in the area are considered to be facing severe food insecurity. In the worst affected areas of Borno and Yobe States in Nigeria, more than 44,000 people are reported to face famine-like conditions. In Mali, 3.8 million people are food insecure, and the number of internally displaced persons rose by about 30 per cent between January and March, to 46,000. In addition, 143,500 Malian refugees are being hosted by Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger. Around 243,000 of the estimated 700,000 people living in the Diffa region of the Niger are internally displaced persons, refugees or nationals of the Niger who have returned from Nigeria.

27. Approximately 260,000 returnees were registered by the Nigeria Immigration Service as of April, and a significant number of internally displaced persons have also returned, including in some newly liberated areas. Owing to increased access, the number of beneficiaries of food assistance increased from 1.2 million to 2.1 million between January and March. However, in May, the Governor of Borno State indicated that it was no longer feasible to provide support for people returning to their areas of habitual residence because of ongoing military operations, and the authorities continued to intensify preparations to close some camps for internally displaced persons in Nigeria. Over 2,600 refugees were reportedly forcibly repatriated between January and March to border villages in Nigeria by the Cameroonian authorities. On 2 March, the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria signed a tripartite agreement with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for voluntary repatriation. The Government of Mali disclosed that about 57,000 refugees had returned, mostly from Mauritania, as of April.

28. Funding shortfalls continued to limit the scope of the humanitarian response. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, $2.6 billion is required in 2017 to provide assistance to 15 million people in eight countries in

West Africa and the Sahel. As of 18 May, only 20 per cent of that amount had been funded. Of the $1.5 billion required for the Lake Chad Basin alone, only 17 per cent had been received by the end of April. Following the appeal launched in December 2016, donors had pledged $672 million for the humanitarian response at a conference in Oslo in February.

F. Trends on human rights

29. Positive developments in relation to human rights were noted in a number of countries. In the Gambia, media outlets that had been closed by the previous regime were reopened. Political prisoners and persons arrested or detained illegally, without charges being brought, were released. In addition, the Government announced a series of measures to ensure compliance with human rights standards and made a commitment to establish a national human rights commission. The Government gave priority to setting up a truth and reconciliation commission, announcing that the commission would begin receiving victim testimonies by September. Moreover, the Government expressed its commitment to revise the Constitution in order to ensure the independence of the judiciary and the media, and to enhance civilian oversight of the security services. Notwithstanding the progress made, some cases were reported in January and February of supporters of the former President being arrested and detained for periods exceeding the constitutionally established maximum.

30. In Guinea, the Minister of Justice announced on 24 March that the trial of those charged in connection with the stadium massacre of September 2009 would start by the end of 2017. On 12 March, Abubakar "Toumba" Diakite, aide-de-camp of the former Head of State, Moussa Dadis Camara, was extradited from Senegal to Guinea, where he was subsequently indicted for a number of crimes, including murder, rape and torture, in connection with the incident. However, a number of high-ranking indicted officials remain in public office, fuelling scepticism about the Government's commitment to addressing widespread concerns over impunity.

31. In Burkina Faso, progress by the High Council for Reconciliation and National Unity in the implementation of its mandate remained slow. The trial of the former President, Blaise Compaoré, in his capacity as Minister of Defence, and 34 co-accused over their role in the violent repression of the popular uprising in October 2014, began on 27 April, but the case has yet to be heard on its merits. In Mauritania, difficulties with respect to the issuance of birth certificates, particularly among certain ethnic and community groups, remained a source of concern. More than 40 per cent of children under 5 years of age are improperly registered, which has resulted in a large stateless population, exacerbating the risk of marginalization, exploitation, trafficking and enslavement. Meanwhile, on 27 April, the Appeals Chamber of the Extraordinary African Chambers in Senegal upheld the life sentence of the former President of Chad, Hissène Habré, for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

32. In Guinea, the security forces were accused of excessive use of force in clashes with protesters in February, which led to the deaths of seven people. In a number of countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone, the authorities banned demonstrations by political opponents, while media outlets were closed in Togo. In response to attacks or threats by terrorist groups, some national authorities continued to subject people suspected of being extremist militants to arbitrary arrest, detention and ill-treatment and to carry out extrajudicial executions. In addition, recourse to judicial measures by victims remained limited, highlighting weaknesses in accountability under national and international legal instruments for human rights violations committed either by armed groups or by security forces.

G. Trends on gender issues

33. On 10 February, the Council of Ministers of ECOWAS adopted four key documents to advance gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of women in political, peace and security processes, notably a strategic framework and action plan on gender equality and elections, 2017-2022; an action plan on women, peace and security within the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework, 2017-2022; a regional action plan for combating obstetric fistula, 2016-2019; and a road map on the implementation of the supplementary Act for sustainable development in relation to the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. In addition, the adoption of a national action plan by Benin brings to 14 the number of West African countries that have put in place action plans on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

A. Good offices and special assignments by my Special Representative

34. Through his good offices missions and in collaboration with regional and international partners, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel continued to support efforts to sustain peace in a number of countries in the region, including by promoting and supporting inclusive national political dialogues, constitutional and democratic reforms, and transparent and peaceful electoral processes.

35. In response to the post-election crisis in the Gambia, my Special Representative engaged with all relevant national, regional and international stakeholders to help to bring about a peaceful resolution to the crisis. He spearheaded the issuance of joint statements by the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations, accompanied Heads of State of the member countries of ECOWAS on their mediation and good offices visits to Banjul and advocated the full support of the international community for action by ECOWAS that aimed to ensure that the outcome of the election in the Gambia was respected. Guided by Security Council resolution 2337 (2017), my Special Representative played a critical role during the final negotiations led by the President of Guinea, Alpha Condé, and the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who were appointed by ECOWAS and supported by the African Union and the United Nations, which resulted in the decision by the former President, Yahya Jammeh, to step down.

36. Following the departure of the former President on 21 January, my Special Representative visited the Gambia five times to support the Government in its efforts to advance democratic governance, promote respect for the rule of law and human rights, reform the security sector and facilitate socioeconomic recovery. He held regular consultations with all relevant stakeholders and supported the efforts of the United Nations country team, including by helping to ensure the timely implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations inter-agency mission to the Gambia in February. With the support of UNOWAS, a joint transition team, comprising members of the former and the incumbent Governments, was established in February. The team completed the handover process in April. From 5 to 7 May, the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNOWAS organized a retreat for cabinet members, which was chaired by the President. The retreat focused on enhancing collaborative leadership skills and improving communication among cabinet members by stimulating discussion on key government priorities. In mid-May, UNOWAS deployed

a strategic communications expert to Banjul to further assist the Government in its efforts to inform the population about its priorities and achievements.

37. On 17 May, following the military mutiny in Côte d'Ivoire, which started on 8 May, my Special Representative travelled to Abidjan with the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Marcel de Souza, and the Secretary-General of the Presidency of Guinea, Naby Youssouf Kiridi Bangoura, on behalf of the African Union. During a meeting with the President, Alassane Ouattara, the delegation reiterated that the United Nations supported his efforts to promote stability. The delegation subsequently issued a joint press statement calling on national actors to address disagreements through dialogue and in conformity with the rule of law.

38. In Guinea, my Special Representative, in coordination with all relevant United Nations entities, continued to work with international partners to encourage national stakeholders to take the measures necessary to implement the political agreement of 12 October 2016. In Sierra Leone, the first post-conflict presidential election without the presence of a United Nations peace mission will be held in March 2018. In anticipation of that election, my Special Representative conducted a mission to Freetown in February, during which he consulted national stakeholders on a number of issues, including the constitutional review process and electoral preparations. He continues to support the Government's fundraising efforts for the electoral process. On 9 and 10 February, he conducted a visit to Togo for consultations with the President and the country's international partners. He reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to provide support to the country in preparation for the local elections.

39. During a meeting, held in Ouagadougou on 3 May, with the President of Burkina Faso, my Special Representative stressed the importance of pursuing the country's agenda on constitutional, judicial and security sector reform. From 9 to 11 March, my Special Representative met with key national and international stakeholders in Mauritania, including representatives of political parties and civil society, and encouraged further political dialogue. In addition, he discussed regional security challenges with the President of Mauritania, the Prime Minister and the Permanent Secretary of G-5 Sahel.

40. My Special Representative, in his capacity as the High-level Representative for Nigeria, remained actively engaged with all national stakeholders in a number of areas, including with respect to the implementation of the Government's key priorities. During his most recent visit to the country at the end of April, he held discussions with relevant national and international stakeholders on efforts to enhance conflict prevention mechanisms, including through the strengthening of the national peace architecture. In the light of transhumance-related tensions across the region, my Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and the ECOWAS Commissioner for Trade, Customs, Free Movement and Tourism met in Praia on 25 January to analyse the situation and propose solutions. In follow-up to that meeting, UNOWAS organized a meeting in Dakar on 4 May in order to present to ECOWAS experts and representatives of the diplomatic community the preliminary findings of a UNOWAS study on pastoralism, security and sustainable livelihoods in West Africa.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

41. Insecurity in the northern Cameroon-Nigeria border area continued to affect the work of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission. On 31 January, an unknown armed group attacked and killed four members of a United Nations technical monitoring team, which was conducting a field mission as part of efforts to

implement the mandate of the Commission. The technical monitoring team was deployed in November 2016 to supervise the construction of 163 pillars, as part of the Commission's border demarcation activities, by the end of the first week of March. Operations were suspended immediately following the attack and an investigation into the incident was launched. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, who is also the Chair of the Commission, met representatives of Cameroon and Nigeria who agreed upon reinforced security measures in order to facilitate a resumption of the Commission's activities. Representatives of Cameroon and Nigeria met with representatives of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and the Commission in Geneva in April to develop a new field security protocol and agreed to resume construction work in October. Despite this setback, the technical monitoring team placed more than half of the pillars foreseen under the current contract during the reporting period. In addition, my Special Representative continued his efforts to raise funds for the replenishment of the extrabudgetary trust fund.

C. Enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security

Security sector reform

42. UNOWAS continued to advise ECOWAS on the operationalization of its framework on security sector reform and governance. A joint mission of ECOWAS, the European Union and UNOWAS to the Gambia was conducted from 15 to 19 May to ensure that all stakeholders shared a common understanding of the country's security sector reform needs and to assist in developing a joint support plan. In Burkina Faso, where a United Nations sustaining peace initiative had been launched in 2016, a United Nations senior adviser on security sector reform was deployed to Ouagadougou in February. His contributions were instrumental in preparing a draft presidential decree outlining the security sector reform process. The decree is expected to be signed into law shortly. The process includes the establishment of an interministerial committee, which will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the security sector, taking into account all existing initiatives. A project supported by the Peacebuilding Fund was approved on 10 March to extend the deployment of the senior adviser for one year and to provide additional resources for the process. In Guinea, the United Nations advisory team on security sector reform continued to support the national process with a view to ensuring sustainability and national ownership of security sector reform management structures and their permanent integration into an organizational framework through the High Council of National Defence. On 29 March, 304 police staff graduated from the country's police academy, which had reopened in 2016.

Boko Haram

43. My Special Representative continued to encourage appropriate diplomatic, security and humanitarian responses to the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram. Following the identification of Nigeria as one of the four countries in the world facing a credible risk of famine, my Special Representative continued to advocate the full disbursement of the pledges made at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference for Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region in February. In follow-up to previous visits conducted in 2016, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, together with my Special Representative for Central Africa and the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, visited countries affected by Boko Haram, namely, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, from 13 to 17 February. During the visit, the delegation consulted national and

international stakeholders on ways of enhancing counter-terrorism measures, strengthening coordination and supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of former militants. In addition, during his visit to Nigeria from 26 to 28 April, my Special Representative discussed security and humanitarian concerns relating to Boko Haram with relevant stakeholders. During the visit, he was informed of recent gains in the fight against Boko Haram in the Sambisa Forest. His interlocutors expressed concern about the risk of famine in the north-east of the country, as well as the continuous plight endured by the internally displaced persons in Borno State. While expressing their appreciation for the support provided by United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, the country's federal and state authorities called for the further scaling-up of distributions by the World Food Programme. Throughout the reporting period, my Special Representative maintained contacts with international actors regarding the release of the girls who had been abducted in Chibok and continued to encourage the Member States, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and ECOWAS to convene the long-planned joint summit on Boko Haram with the aim of developing a regional strategy.

44. With the support of the European Union, UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued to work with the Nigerian authorities to strengthen criminal justice responses to terrorism, including by facilitating effective inter-agency coordination and cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of cases. From 20 to 22 June, UNODC and the Committee brought together officials in Nigeria from a variety of government institutions to review the prosecution strategy for terrorism cases and to recommend measures to strengthen inter-agency coordination.

Strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union

45. Together with the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, UNOWAS participated in a workshop organized by the Peacebuilding Support Office and UNDP on 20 and 21 April in Abidjan, aimed at developing a project to enhance cooperation between the border communities of the two countries and to strengthen the capacities of the joint border security and confidence-building units. The project will be funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). A total of 12 joint border security units have been established within the framework of the cross-border security architecture of the Mano River Union. In addition, from 15 to 17 February, the International Organization for Migration, UNDP, UNMIL, UNOCI, UNODC and UNOWAS met in Dakar to discuss ways of enhancing cooperation among United Nations system entities in the context of the drawdown of UNOCI and UNMIL. During the meeting, the need for stronger national ownership in efforts to revitalize the Union was highlighted.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

46. During the reporting period, ECCAS and ECOWAS made progress in operationalizing the Interregional Coordination Centre in Yaoundé. In March, the ECOWAS Commission and Côte d'Ivoire signed an agreement on the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in West Africa, which is to be based in Abidjan. My Special Representative continued to work with the ECOWAS Commission to encourage Ghana to sign an agreement to host the headquarters for Zone F, which comprises Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. He was also instrumental in securing an agreement with Cabo Verde to host the headquarters for Zone G, covering the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal. In addition, to inform the efforts of China and the United States to promote peace in Africa, my Special Representative attended a consultation meeting organized by the

Carter Center and the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., on 11 and 12 April, during which tripartite cooperation in the maritime domain was discussed.

Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

47. From 20 April to 15 May, UNOWAS worked together with partner entities of the West Africa Coast Initiative, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and UNODC, to conduct assessments in three of the four pilot countries of the Initiative, namely, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The partner entities noted that the Initiative, which had been designed in 2009, remained "fit for purpose" to counter transnational organized crime, trafficking in drugs and other illicit trafficking. They observed, however, that the transnational organized crime units were not yet fully operational. Despite strong political commitment, the units continue to rely on donor funding for operational activities. While funding from each country's budget is critical for the long-term sustainability of the units, economic challenges and competing national priorities have prevented some Governments from disbursing the funds allocated. The units are currently financed through contributing officers of law enforcement agencies, the West Africa Coast Initiative and peace operations that are drawing down. Continued funding and support from the international community will be essential for maintaining the daily operations of the units.

D. Implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

48. On 6 March, my Special Representative briefed the Peacebuilding Commission on the situation in the Sahel. He also attended the fourth meeting of Sahel Special Envoys, hosted by Luxembourg and the European Union on 14 and 15 March. Following preparatory meetings held in April by the three working groups of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the Regional Director's Team of the United Nations Development Group, my Special Representative held a meeting of the Steering Committee of the integrated strategy on 5 May to discuss ways of fast-tracking the recommendations of the independent review of the integrated strategy, which had been submitted to the Council in January 2017. The Steering Committee agreed that the strategy would guide the United Nations in its engagement in the Sahel, while acknowledging the existing frameworks used by some United Nations entities in the region. In that regard, the role of the working groups of the Regional Director's Team and the integrated strategy was acknowledged as key to ensuring programmatic coherence. On 14 June, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support attended the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel, which was held in N'Djamena and chaired by Chad. A series of decisions were adopted at the meeting with a view to revitalizing the Platform and its support mechanisms, including through linkages between the working groups of the integrated strategy and the Platform.

49. The three working groups of the integrated strategy continued to advance programme delivery and joint activities with regional and subregional organizations. Several flagship projects were completed in March, including a UNDP project on border management and border communities in the Sahel and a project of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa on action in support of physical security and stockpile management activities to reduce the risk of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and their ammunitions in the Sahel region. The UNODC programme entitled "Strengthening the Sahel against crime and

terrorism" is ongoing and played a major role in the establishment in Burkina Faso in January of specialized judicial units to improve the legal response to transnational organized crime and terrorism. My Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel attended a meeting of the Steering Committee of the UNODC programme for the Sahel on 5 and 6 April, which demonstrated the increased coordination between the United Nations and national Governments, as well as the stronger linkages between countries in West Africa and the Maghreb. Under the resilience pillar of the integrated strategy, the initiative of the United Nations Population Fund on harnessing the demographic dividend for the future of the Sahel, in cooperation with ECOWAS and the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel, served to strengthen links with G-5 Sahel. However, lack of funds has hampered the implementation of three important flagship projects under the pillar, namely, on support for resilient pastoralism, strengthening the resilience of mobile populations and vulnerable communities and accelerating progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women to increase resilience in the Sahel.

50. The reporting period was characterized by a stronger partnership between the United Nations and G-5 Sahel. On 6 February, my Deputy Special Representative attended the third ordinary Summit of the Heads of State of G-5 Sahel, held in Bamako. In follow-up to her participation, UNOWAS and MINUSMA provided technical support for the preparation of the strategic concept of operations of the Joint Force proposed at the Summit. My Deputy Special Representative and the Permanent Secretary of G-5 Sahel led the review, in Nouakchott on 6 and 7 March, of the road map for cooperation between the United Nations and G-5 Sahel, which endorsed a new methodology for developing joint projects and fundraising.

51. Through its liaison cell in Nouakchott, UNOWAS engaged in a series of meetings with bilateral and multilateral partners, including the African Union and the European Union, in order to enhance synergies in support of G-5 Sahel. In response to Security Council resolution 2295 (2016), UNOWAS also stepped up collaboration with MINUSMA and facilitated the Mission's contribution to the review of the road map. The cell also collaborated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to enhance the integration of human rights considerations into the work of G-5 Sahel, and with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to facilitate the deployment of a gender adviser within the permanent secretariat of G-5 Sahel.

52. UNOWAS supported G-5 Sahel initiatives on countering violent extremism, while ensuring a concerted approach by regional United Nations actors in the operationalization of the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism of 2016. On 8 and 9 March, UNOWAS and the Permanent Secretariat of G-5 Sahel organized a meeting of national experts of the Group's cell for the prevention of radicalization. The meeting examined standard operating procedures and developed work plans for 2017-2018, including community and media sensitization activities and outreach to religious bodies. UNOWAS provided assistance for the establishment of the Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre, which commenced operations in Nouakchott in June. From 17 to 19 May, UNOWAS also contributed to the third African Union regional workshop for the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization, held in Nouakchott, in cooperation with G-5 Sahel and the African Union. On 31 May and 1 June, my Special Representative participated in the Second Regional Conversation for the Prevention of Violent Extremism on the theme "Investing in peace and the prevention of violence in the Sahel-Sahara", organized by the International Peace Institute and the Government of Switzerland.

E. Promotion of good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

53. From 8 to 12 May, UNOWAS participated in the sixtieth ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. It was preceded by a forum of non-governmental organizations, during which UNOWAS co-chaired a panel on impunity, justice and human rights in the context of violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel. On the margins of the session, UNOWAS also organized two dialogue sessions on issues relating to human rights, governance and the rule of law, during which participants called for greater transparency with respect to civilian casualties of counter-terrorism operations, particularly in the Lake Chad Basin. In support of the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Question of Impunity, the International Organization of La Francophonie, OHCHR, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNOWAS organized, from 28 to 30 March, a training workshop for 26 trainers from the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection of Mali, as well as media professionals, which resulted in the adoption of a plan of action on maintaining order and respect for freedom of expression.

54. During the reporting period, UNOWAS efforts to promote the role of women and youth in conflict prevention focused on creating synergies among regional organizations and raising awareness on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, youth, peace and security. Representatives of UNOWAS participated in a meeting of ministers of gender and women's affairs from member countries of ECOWAS in early February, attended a joint planning session with ECOWAS and United Nations entities on 4 May and addressed the ECOWAS West African Network of Young Female Leaders in a regional forum, which was held from 10 to 14 June. In cooperation with G-5 Sahel, UNOWAS discussed issues relating to gender, radicalization and extremism in a workshop held in Nouakchott on 18 and 19 January and contributed to a high-level dialogue held in Bamako on 21 and 22 February aimed at promoting women's leadership in the prevention of violent extremism. Shortly before the dialogue, UNOWAS took part in a meeting establishing the G-5 Sahel Women's Platform, which adopted an implementation road map. As part of its role as the secretariat of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, UNOWAS hosted the Group's annual planning meeting in Dakar on 26 January and facilitated three thematic exchange sessions in March and April.

55. From 28 to 31 March, UNOWAS facilitated a mission of the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel to the Gambia. The Working Group met local women and youth organizations, as well as national authorities, including the President of the Gambia, to explore ways of enhancing the contribution of women and youth to the Government's agenda for peace and development. On 30 March, my Special Representative met the new Director of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre to discuss the support provided by UNOWAS for the implementation of gender-related United Nations resolutions in West Africa.

56. On 9 May, my Special Representative attended a ministerial meeting in Banjul, organized by ECOWAS and UNHCR, on the eradication of statelessness in West Africa. In his keynote remarks, he stressed the need for a regional response on the issue. During the meeting, representatives of the member States of ECOWAS validated an action plan for the eradication of statelessness by 2024, which includes specific measures to identify, prevent, reduce and raise awareness on statelessness. The plan of action will be submitted to the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and the

ECOWAS Summit of Heads of State and Government for adoption as a legally binding instrument.

IV. Observations and recommendations

57. During the reporting period, there were several positive developments in the overall situation in West Africa and the Sahel. I was particularly encouraged by the peaceful transition of power in the Gambia, which demonstrated the democratic maturity of its people and showcased the effective collaboration between the United Nations, regional organizations and other international stakeholders. I encourage the political leaders of the Gambia to continue to promote national reconciliation and to lay the foundation for accountable governance and sustainable growth. I also call on international partners to support the Gambia at this critical juncture.

58. I commend the authorities of Burkina Faso on the progress achieved, with United Nations support, in reforming and reorganizing the security sector and in promoting national reconciliation. I call on institutional partners and donors to ensure close coordination with the country and support for its efforts to sustain peace and consolidate stability and democratic gains.

59. I welcome the return to calm in Côte d'Ivoire following the instability created by military elements in May and commend the Government on the measures taken to restore order. I reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to supporting the Government's efforts to sustain the hard-won gains of peace and stability. Following the closure of UNOCI on 30 June, UNOWAS will continue to follow developments in the country within the context of its regional mandate. As the United Nations peacekeeping footprint in West Africa becomes lighter, with the end of the UNMIL mandate foreseen in March 2018, the role of UNOWAS in helping to preserve the achievements made in peace consolidation in post-conflict countries will become increasingly important.

60. I am encouraged by the progress being made by some countries of the region in the fight against corruption, which continues to compromise good governance, delegitimize State authority and undermine the fight against violent extremism. I commend the Government of Nigeria, in particular, on the gains made in this area. I also congratulate the outreach efforts made by the Nigerian authorities in the Niger Delta, which have resulted in reduced violence in the area.

61. I welcome the efforts that are being made to carry out political and constitutional reforms in several countries in the region, as well as the steps being taken to strengthen human rights protection, and I urge national stakeholders to continue to engage in dialogue in a spirit of tolerance and inclusivity. In this regard, I call upon national stakeholders to work together to facilitate the holding of local elections, where they are due. I also urge them to work towards increasing the number of women appointed to senior government positions in accordance with national and regional commitments.

62. I remain worried by the prevalence of terrorist and violent extremist threats in the region and the linkages with transnational organized crime. In this regard, I welcome the leadership demonstrated by countries in West Africa and the Sahel to tackle security challenges in the region. I support the establishment of the Joint Force of G-5 Sahel and the imminent deployment of its 5,000 personnel. I also commend the efforts of the countries participating in the Multinational Joint Task Force, which have reduced the operational capacities and geographical reach of Boko Haram. I note with concern the continuing attacks on military and civilian targets, which are hampering resettlement and rehabilitation efforts and providing a

breeding ground for extremism. I encourage stronger partnership among the affected countries, as well as with regional organizations, including the African Union, and reiterate my call for all counter-insurgency efforts to be carried out in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. I wholeheartedly welcome the release of the 82 Chibok girls and encourage continuous efforts towards the release of more Boko Haram abductees.

63. While I welcome the humanitarian assistance already provided by regional and international partners to the countries affected by Boko Haram, I remain very concerned about food insecurity in the region. I urge donors to support the humanitarian response in the Lake Chad Basin, which remains critically underfunded, and to quickly disburse the funds pledged at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference for Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region in February. I also urge the international community to support efforts to address the root causes of the Boko Haram crisis. I welcome the visit by a delegation from the Security Council to the Lake Chad region, which drew attention to this neglected crisis.

64. I commend the close cooperation between the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, G-5 Sahel, the European Union and other partners in support of stability in the Sahel region and reiterate the dedication of the United Nations to ensuring the effective implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. I commend the donor community for its generous support for the region and encourage Governments in the region and development partners to explore innovative ways to use these resources to achieve a greater development impact. I also call on all stakeholders to take the steps required to create the security and political conditions necessary for the implementation of development assistance in the Sahel region.

65. I condemn the tragic attack on the technical monitoring team of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission on 31 January, which resulted in the deaths of four personnel, and look forward to the completion of the investigation into the incident by the relevant authorities. I welcome the expeditious measures undertaken to enhance security and resume the border demarcation activities in order to give effect to the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002.

66. I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Governments of West Africa and the Sahel region, the African Union, ECOWAS, G-5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my appreciation to the United Nations system in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions for their close partnership with UNOWAS in the implementation of its mandate. I would like to express particular appreciation to my Special Representative, as well as the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.